

*President London M.A.  
with best regards  
E.P.S.*

WYCLIFFE COLLEGE

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



—THE—

INSPIRATION AND AUTHORITY

OF THE

HOLY SCRIPTURES



AN ADDRESS TO THE ALUMNI

BY THE

REV. PRINCIPAL SHERATON, D.D.

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# THE INSPIRATION AND AUTHORITY OF THE SCRIPTURES

BY THE REV. PRINCIPAL SHERATON, D.D.  
WYCLIFFE COLLEGE, TORONTO.

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If there is any truth that is vital and fundamental to Christian life and to Christian work, especially the work of the Christian minister, it is that of the inspiration and supremacy of the Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The preacher must take his stand upon eternal certainties, not upon peradventures. "Thus saith the Lord" must be the ground of every message that is effective to carry conviction or to bring hope and strength to the sons of men. Yet even this fundamental truth is called in question, and those who hold fast to it must be prepared to give a reason for their faith. It is not a new thing that it should be challenged, but the challenge comes from a new and, it may be said, unexpected quarter, from those who are Bible students, and who profess to study more thoroughly and to understand more completely the old book

than any before them. The questions raised by "the higher criticism" as to the nature, position, and authority of the Scriptures cannot be lightly set aside; they must be faced, not by denunciation, but by demonstration. The refutation of error is not to be found in less searching, but in more searching enquiry and investigation. What we want is more knowledge, more light. The Scriptures will bear the utmost scrutiny. A despondent pessimism is as little becoming to Christian believers as a contemptuous anger. Like St. Paul's bonds, in which he gloried, these questionings, perplexities, and conflicts, so far from being prejudicial to the Gospel, will serve to advance it. In this restless age, with its material triumphs, its achievements in science, its momentous questionings, its social ideals, the Bible and the Christ of the Bible still remain the supreme and central object of interest. Is this nothing? Never were the Scriptures more widely disseminated, more eagerly read, more keenly discussed, and, need we wonder, more persistently challenged. What if there be the removing of those things that are shaken? The things which cannot be shaken, the eternal verities, will abide. These struggles and conflicts are but the *odines* (Matt. xxiv. 8), the birth-pangs, which usher in a new and grander manifestation of Christ's kingdom.

We have every reason, then, to be joyously confident, to be calm and strong in our faith in the Word of the living God ; but we must not underestimate the seriousness of the present crisis, nor the severity of the trials through which the church of Christ is called to pass. The optimism of faith is no superficial and supercilious thoughtlessness. While it assures us of victory, it does not disguise the imminence of the peril nor the strength of the foe.

#### THE QUESTION AT ISSUE.

Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God, which is the only ground and warrant of faith. Hence St. Paul's earnest desire for the Corinthians that their faith "should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" ; and his thankfulness for the Thessalonians, that they had received the Gospel, "not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God."

The tendency to substitute man's word for God's, or to bring down God's Word to the level of man's, is not peculiar to the present age. It runs through the whole course of church history, and it manifests itself in three forms—sacerdotalism, mysticism, and rationalism. In sacerdotalism, the method of the Pharisees, who made void the commandments of God by the traditions of men, is perpetuated.

For the supremacy of the Scriptures may be undermined by a process of addition, as well as of subtraction. The Church of Rome at the Council of Trent (Sess. IV.) uncompromisingly asserted the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures, affirming them to be dictated by the Holy Ghost. But it ascribed the same origin to a body of unwritten traditions, handed down and preserved in the Catholic Church, and claimed for them co-ordinate authority with the Scriptures themselves. Moreover, it maintained it to be the prerogative of the church "to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures." Thus the Scriptures were deprived of their unique place and authority as effectively as they could be by any dilution or denial of their inspiration. So the Tractarians affirmed (Tract 78) that "Scripture and tradition, taken together, are the joint rule of faith." As Dean Goode (Case as it is, p. 10, quoted in Bucknell, p. 247) observes, they make tradition the authoritative interpreter of Scripture, from which there is no appeal, and thus they give it authority over Scripture.

But the sacerdotal position has of late undergone a remarkable modification, through the advance of historical criticism. It is not possible to refer to a continuous apostolic tradition in support of dogmas and usages whose genesis and growth

are no longer shrouded in the obscurity of a pseudo-antiquity, but distinctly traceable to their source. The dogma of the catholic consent of the undivided church, embodied in the famous maxim of Vincentius Lerinensis, that that only is to be held as truth *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum*, has proved untenable, even though its requirement of universality be reduced, as it was by Vincentius himself, to the concurrence of the majority of the clergy. But the philosophical Roman theologians and the later Tractarians or Anglo-Catholics have sought relief from their difficulties in the theory of a continuous inspiration of the church, by which the Holy Ghost implants the germs and controls the development of dogmas confessedly not to be found in the Scriptures. The inspired Scriptures are thus effectively superseded by an inspired church, and no longer remain the sole source and supreme rule of doctrine. The conception of the inspiration of the Scriptures is lowered to admit of its consisting with the defects, errors, and obscurities attributed to the sacred writings by rationalistic criticism ; at the same time, the sacerdotal claims are maintained and strengthened. Thus Mr. Gore tells us that " It is becoming more and more difficult to believe in the Bible without believing in the church " ; that is, faith in the church, its decisions, interpreta-

tions, and dogmas is to be the basis and ground of faith in the Scriptures. This is the complete reversal of the Evangelical and Protestant position.

The mystic, in the enthusiasm of his spirituality and his contempt for the external, substitutes an inner light, a subjective revelation in and through the consciousness, for the objective historical revelation. He would evolve truth solely from an inward self-contemplation, and thus makes every man his own Bible, forgetting that *quot homines, tot sententiæ*.

The rationalist either denies any other revelation than such as is given in and by the reason of all men; or admitting it in some sort, yet makes the reason the *a priori* arbiter of its contents, and the final court of appeal to which it must conform and by which its reception must be decided.

In these three ways the Word of God is superseded by the word of man; and of the three the sacerdotal must prove the most popular. When the personality is strong, and the bent is towards individualism, then the position of the mystic or of the rationalist will be taken according as the religious feeling or the intellect predominates. But, after all, the mystics and the rationalists must be in the minority. The men who feel themselves strong and sufficient in their own individualism will be comparatively few. The great majority seek for com-



panionship, for fellowship, for some external support, for some authoritative teaching and guidance from beyond themselves; and if they do not find this directly in the Word of God, they will seek for it in the word and claims of the church. It is remarkable to what an extent even the mystic and the rationalist are at present approximating towards this position. Take the recent brilliant, but mischievous, "Yale Lectures on Preaching," by Dr. Horton. A fascinating mysticism is at once the strength and the weakness of this book. He declares that inspiration is continuous in the church, and insists upon unknown possibilities of new revelations to modern spiritual men. When and where these revelations are given, he miserably fails to show. He is illogical and inconsistent in his reasonings. Yet he maintains his theory of continuous inspiration in opposition to what he calls "the shallow doctrine of Scripture which Protestantism has hugged for two centuries or more." Thus he supersedes the Bible by the church; and it is only a step, and to most men an inevitable step, from the mystic sublimation which Dr. Horton calls the church to the concrete and realistic claims of the papacy.

Then, if we look to those whose strength lies not in the mystic feeling, but in the rational criticism, the same phenomenon is presented.

Even that moderate churchman, Dr. Sanday, is led to the conclusion that in future it will not be so much to the Bible itself, but to the advancing consciousness of the church and the consensus of scholars that men will turn for the ground of their acceptance of doctrines. The sacerdotal conception of a mediating priesthood here reappears under the guise of a scholastic hierarchy. This, then, is the issue to which we are being forced. The mystic and the rationalist are both paving the way for the advance of sacerdotalism. But let no one imagine that the meeting place will be found in the molluscos theology and illogical compromises of æsthetical Anglo-Catholicism. Possibly the mystic might find there a place in which to dream ; but it can neither sustain the onset of rational enquiry nor satisfy the longings of men for an assured and supreme authority. Logically, there can be only one issue ; spiritually, only one alternative—submission to an imposing and united historical hierarchy, or obedience to the divine Word, completely manifested in Jesus Christ, and recorded in the Holy Scriptures.

It must not be overlooked that each of these errors is but the isolation and exaggeration of a truth. It is not the value which the mystic attaches to the apprehension and appropriation of truth in the consciousness that is at fault ; it is his attempt

to give the consciousness an originating power, to develop from it subjectively what must and can come to us only by means of an objective revelation. But the truth revealed from without must be appropriated within before it can in any real sense become our own. Without experimental knowledge of it, it remains practically unknown. Every Christian, every Christian teacher, must personally appropriate truth and receive and hold it as a message from God to himself.

So, again, it is not the high esteem in which the rationalist holds the divine gifts of reason that is in error; but his attempt to convert that which is our chief instrument for the appropriation and assimilation of truth into the source and measure of it. Christianity is pre-eminently rational; for it is constituted upon the supreme manifestation of the divine Wisdom in Christ, and it must and will completely justify itself to the reason of man. Let us, then, esteem the gifts of reason above rubies; let us honour its workings and reverence its questionings. As Bishop Lightfoot grandly said, "The abnegation of reason is not the evidence of faith, but the confession of despair. Reason and reverence are natural allies, though untoward circumstances may sometimes interpose and divorce them." Let us be mindful of the warning of Hooker, and take

care that we are not of the number of those "who think they cannot admire, as they ought, the power of the Word of God if in things divine they should attribute any force to man's reason."

An element of truth underlies even the exaggerations and perversions of sacerdotalism. Give the idea of the church its true significance, and we find it to be a most divine and necessary medium of truth. The supreme revelation of truth was given in a life. Our Lord not only said, "I am the Light"; He also said, "I am the Life"; and the Life was the Light of men. So the goal and purpose of that revelation is the transmutation of the truth back again into life, the life of all who believe in the truth; and it is by the truth thus embodied in life, in character and conduct, in the men and women who receive it and are transformed by it, that the Divine Revelation is extended and perpetuated in the world. By mutual sympathy, mutual teaching, mutual influence in the communion of saints, men are brought into and nurtured in the body of Christ. It is only by the discovering of the element of truth which underlies an error that we can disarm and correct it. Without the recognition of such truth we cannot have sympathy with, much less do justice to, those in bondage to the error, or hope to win them from it.

Now, as we have just observed, the occasion

and stimulus to recent theological tendencies and developments has been what is generally called "the higher criticism." The term is not very satisfactory, and is often popularly misunderstood. It is applied to literary criticism in distinction from textual or lower criticism. Lower criticism is the branch of theological study which is occupied with the text of the sacred writings ; its transmission and correction. Higher criticism is that branch which is devoted to the study of the literary form and style, the reliability and integrity, of the Scriptures. Ever since the Reformation released the Scriptures from the bondage in which traditionalism and ceremonialism had held them, Biblical studies have held a conspicuous place, but they have assumed a more complete and scientific form during the present century. Lower criticism has accomplished a magnificent work, notwithstanding the aspersions cast upon it, and the unworthy suspicions with which its pioneers were received. The very mention of various readings and of an emendation of the sacred text sounded to many as sacrilegious ; but, thanks to the sacrifices and labours of scholars such as Lachmann, Tischendorf, Tregelles, Westcott, and Hort, we now possess a settled and firmly established text of the New Testament, and we stand nearer than ever before, and in most cases with absolute confidence, to the *ipsissima verba* of

the writers. It constitutes one great difficulty in present controversies, that the textual criticism of the Old Testament still remains so unsettled.

The higher criticism is a much more difficult department, involving many complex questions, and exposed to a degree far beyond lower criticism to the personal idiosyncracies and tendencies of the workers. Its use and results depend largely upon the methods followed, which may be good or bad, and upon the spirit and aims of the student. It has in the past been very largely, too largely, subjective. Accidents of individual taste have been erected into absolute laws, and personal preferences have been made the standard and criterion of credibility and trustworthiness. It is no wonder that great mischief has been wrought, rash conclusions presented as assured truths, and bold generalizations advanced upon the slenderest foundations of conjecture. The evil has been all the greater when the critic has been devoid of the primary qualification of the Christian spirit and sympathy with Christian truth, or when he has, as in not a few notable instances, been the avowed disciple of a dreary and superficial naturalism and the antagonist of supernatural revelation.

What is wanted is some external standard ; some means of testing the truth or false-

hood of critical opinion independent of the conjectures and preferences of the critics. Such a corrective standard will ere long be supplied by the researches of archæology, which is every year bringing forward new evidences of the credibility of the sacred writers. The testimony written in the rocks and in the disentombed structures of the past cannot be gainsaid; and as Schliemann reconstructed the buried Ilium, which the critics had consigned to the limbo of myth and fable, so we have good reason to believe will the patient exploration in Bible lands, with pick and spade, afford ample confirmation of the sacred story. A positive element will be imparted to the higher criticism, so that it will no longer remain what it is fast becoming in the hands of some of its devotees—a science of mere negations.

But, with all the evils and drawbacks of which we may justly complain, there are marked benefits which have already accrued from the study, especially in its bringing out the orderly progression of predictive prophecy respecting the Messiah and the wonderful progress of doctrine both in the Old and New Testaments. And there is still ample scope and abundant work for a reverent, truth-loving criticism, which deals with the Bible as the veritable Word of God, and searches it in order to present more luminously

and effectively the great revelation it contains.

Let us now return to the issue to which the questions raised by the higher criticism have led up. Has that criticism discredited the great Protestant and Evangelical doctrine concerning the Scriptures? Are we still to maintain that they have been given by inspiration of God, and that they constitute the one supreme and infallible rule of faith? Here are indicated the two lines to be briefly traversed in this discussion. There is, first, the *process*—given by inspiration; there is, secondly, the *product*—an infallible, inerrant rule of faith.

#### THE PROCESS OF INSPIRATION.

First, let us consider the *process*—"Given by inspiration." What is inspiration?

##### I. REVELATION AND INSPIRATION.

We must at the outset carefully distinguish between *inspiration* and *revelation*. The Bible *is* inspired; it *contains* a revelation. All is not revealed, but all is inspired. Revelation, in its broadest sense, includes every manifestation of God to the perception and consciousness of man. God is self-manifested in the natural order of things, in the works of creation, in the processes of providence, and in the constitution of man's mind. Whatever might have been the case had the



course of man's development been unbroken by sin, it is only too plain that on account of human blindness and self-will this general revelation is altogether inadequate. It fails, above all, in this, that it provides no pardon for the guilty, no recovery for the lost. Hence the necessity for that special revelation of which we have the record in the Holy Scriptures. When we speak of revelation without qualification, it is this special and written revelation which is meant. It is a self-manifestation of God as the God of grace. He reveals Himself by entering into relations with men. He enters into their life, calls them into fellowship with Himself, sends to them messages and promises and tokens from Himself, condescends to a wonderful familiarity of intercourse with them. In many parts and in many modes, He spoke unto the fathers by the prophets. It was a fragmentary and preliminary revelation, of which the Old Testament is the record, the whole being preparatory to the supreme and complete self-revelation of God in His Son, which is recorded by chosen witnesses, evangelists, and teachers in the New Testament.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the great exegete and interpreter of God. He is the outshining of His glory and the express image of His substance, the visible image of the invisible God. "He that hath seen me," He declares, "hath seen the Father."

“Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” Truth is the self-revelation of God. Grace is the self-giving of God. God revealed Himself by giving Himself. God is love. Love is self-sacrifice. Hence the gift of the only-begotten Son in the incarnation and atonement becomes the highest revelation of God. Through it God is revealed, as He was not and could not be otherwise. In it not only is divine wisdom displayed, but divine power is manifested—power to forgive and heal, and restore fallen man to fellowship with the eternal Father. This revelation took the form of an historical movement which culminated in the coming of Jesus Christ. In it God dealt with men in the concrete, in the facts and transactions of life. He taught them through events. He did not reveal Himself in abstractions and general principles; but He manifested Himself in actual contact with men, as one with whom they could become acquainted; He makes Himself personally known to men in a long succession of dealings with them, accompanied by His enlightening Word, unfolding His mind and purpose, while men are brought into contact with Him on all sides of their being.

Such an historical revelation implies progress, growth, development. It began with primary truths conveyed in an elementary way through concrete examples. Gradually, it became enlarged

in its scope, and more advanced and spiritual in its methods. The character of God is revealed, not abstractly, but in definite transactions which bring Him near to men, and which manifest His interest in them and set forth His will for them. Thus His attributes of truth, faithfulness, power, mercy, were practically unfolded, and man learned what God is. So the evil of sin was brought out by the experience of its evil consequences, and in the Levitical system by the way in which men were compelled to approach God and to deal with Him about it. In like manner, the coming Deliverer was set forth, point by point, in types and promises, and the outline gradually expanded and filled up. That which the Old Testament foreshadowed is realized and fulfilled in Him whose advent and life and teaching, as recorded by evangelists, and illustrated and applied by apostles, make up the substance and contents of the New Testament.

It is at once apparent that the record of such a revelation must contain much besides the revelation itself. It must contain the historical environment in which the revelation was presented. Besides the truths of natural religion, it must include many facts and truths which come within the ken of ordinary human intelligence, and which form no part of the revelation itself. Strictly speaking, reve-

lation is the communication of truths concerning the divine nature and the kingdom of God which could not otherwise be known. It is an *apokalupsis*, an unveiling of that which already exists in the world of unseen realities and in the divine will and purpose, and which man could only know as God is pleased to disclose it.

Inspiration is that divine influence by virtue of which inspired men were enabled to speak and to write truthfully and authoritatively both the truths given by revelation and other truths and facts relating to the kingdom of God, not forming part of the revelation, but constituting its necessary environment.

## II. THE DIVINE AND HUMAN ELEMENTS.

"All scripture," declares St. Paul (II. Tim. iii. 16), "is given by inspiration of God"; literally, is God-breathed, *theopneustos*. (I decidedly prefer the rendering of the Authorized Version and the Revised Version margin. The construction has its exact parallel in I. Tim. iv. 4. See Moule, in *Clergyman's Magazine*, March, '89, p. 138. Still the other rendering does not affect the sense. *Theopneustos* remains as the defining predicate and characteristic of every Scripture.) St. Peter emphatically declares that "Men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost" (II. Pet. i. 21, Revised Version).

“God,” says the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, “spake unto the fathers by (in) the prophets.” Inspiration, then, implies a co-operation of the divine with the human. It is the contact and influence of the divine Spirit upon the human spirit. The process lies beneath the consciousness. We cannot explain the mode of the divine working, but we know its results. We can have no just conception of inspiration unless we take adequate account of the two factors. There is a striking analogy here between the constitution of the Scriptures and the constitution of the person of our blessed Lord. From a mistaken reverence, His divine nature has sometimes been so viewed and its relation to His humanity so explained as to virtually evacuate the incarnation and divest His human nature of all reality, removing Him far from human sympathy and kinship, and thus contributing to the exaltation of a human creature, the mother of His humanity, to take His place as mediator and nearest of kin to us. This ignoring of the human nature worked almost as disastrously to Christianity as the opposite humanitarian tendency which denied or detracted from the reality of His Godhead.

In the case of the Scriptures, we suffer most today from the belittling of the divine element in them; the tendency to view and treat them as mere

literature, perhaps the purest and most exalted in their ethical and religious contents, but still differing, only in degree, not in nature, from kindred productions of human genius and expressions of human thought and feeling. Yet we must not forget that this is partly a reaction against an opposite tendency which so exalted the divine in the Scriptures as to ignore their genuine human character, and to deprive them of those human characteristics and limitations in which the personality of the writers finds expression.

1. We must, on the one hand, most strongly emphasize, most resolutely maintain, *the divine origin and character of these divine writings*. God "spake by the prophets," Heb. i. 1; and, more than that, St. Paul declares (Rom. i. 2) that God spake "through the prophets *in the Holy Scriptures*." Thus it is not only affirmed that the prophets spoke, but that they also wrote, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The limits of this brief paper do not admit of an exhaustive consideration of the Biblical teaching upon this subject. But it is self-evident that it is to the Bible itself we must go for a Biblical doctrine of inspiration; and there can be little doubt as to what it claims and affirms in regard to the divine sanction and origin of its contents. The Jews contemporary with our Lord and with the

writers of the New Testament, held explicitly the divine origin of every word of the Old Testament. It was affirmed, *e.g.*, by Philo, who set forth an elaborate theory of inspiration, that every portion of every book was written under divine inspiration, and that knowledge of all matters which could not naturally be acquired by the prophets was communicated to them by direct revelation from God. Our Lord and His apostles employed the same terms and expressions in regard to the Old Testament which were in contemporary use. "We find," says Rothe, "in the New Testament authors the same theoretical view of the Old Testament, and the same practice as to its use, as among the Jews of the time in general." Again, he says, "Our authors look upon the words of the Old Testament as immediate words of God, and adduce them expressly as such, even those of them which are not at all related as direct sayings of God. They see nothing at all in the sacred volume which is simply the word of its human author and not, at the same time, the very word of God Himself. In all that stands 'written' God Himself speaks to them, and so entirely are they habituated to think only of this that they receive the sacred Word written itself, as such, as God's Word, and hear God speaking in it immediately, without any thought of the human persons who appear in it as speaking and act-

ing." He adds that they "refer the prophetic inspiration also to the *actus scribendi* of the Biblical authors. The whole style and method of their treatment of the Old Testament text manifestly presupposes in them this view of the matter, which was at the time the usual one in the Jewish schools." In his "Dogmatik," Tholuck states that the application of the Old Testament made in the Epistle to the Hebrews "rests on the strictest view of inspiration, since passages where God is not the speaker are cited as words of God, or of the Holy Ghost." And he refers to Heb. i. 6, 7, 8 ; iii. 7 ; iv. 4, 7 ; vii. 21 ; x. 15. Pfeiderer ("Paulinism," 1 : 88) admits that St. Paul "fully shared the assumption of his opponents, namely, the irrefragable authority of the letter as the immediately revealed Word of God." In like manner, Archdeacon Farrar ("Life of St. Paul," 28) says that St. Paul "shared, doubtless, in the views of the later Jewish schools—the Tanaim and Amoraim—on the nature of inspiration. These views, which we find also in Philo, made the words of Scripture co extensive and identical with the words of God." Surely this is conclusive as to the New Testament doctrine of inspiration, as based upon the exegetical study of the New Testament by those who themselves do not accept this view. The plenary theory of the inspiration of the Scripture, was the theory of our



Lord Himself and His apostles, as men of all schools admit. The New Testament unmistakably teaches this doctrine ; and if its teaching is not trustworthy in this regard, can it be trustworthy in any other? To question it is to overturn the foundations of the Christian faith. How, then, do those who adopt a lower view of inspiration than that of the New Testament justify their position?

Some assert, as to our Lord, that He really shared the view of His contemporaries, but that in this He displayed that fallibility and ignorance which constituted a portion of His humiliation in becoming man. If so, then Christ was not free from error, and error affecting the very mission He came to effect. He came to reveal the Father, and He claims to know the things of the Father, the whole compass and contents of the Father's will and character ; and yet He is supposed ignorantly to ascribe to the Father what He never gave. Then, too, if Christ is not free from error, how can He be free from sin? The two are bound up together, as Gretillat observes (*"Exposé de Theol. Syst,"* 4 : 288), "by reason of the relation which unites the intelligence with the will." Such a Christ as this theory would require is thereby proved absolutely incompetent for His work.

Others argue that our Lord did not share the views of His contemporaries, but spoke as He did

by way of accommodation to Jewish prejudices. Was our Lord accustomed thus to defer to prejudice? The whole story of His life-long conflict disproves this. Had He deferred a little to Jewish prejudice, He would not have been rejected and crucified by His own people. Our Lord's accommodation of His teaching to the capacity of His hearers, the method of the wise teacher, is not to be confounded with such a concession to and adoption of fundamental error as such a view as this asserts.

But another and equally formidable difficulty still remains. If our Lord did not share the views of His contemporaries, His apostles did, and the advocates of this accommodation theory do not hesitate to assert this divergence between Him and them. But in discrediting the apostles, they discredit Christ Himself; for He conveyed His authority to them. He not only accredited them as His agents and representatives, but He gave them the promise of His Spirit to lead them into all the truth; and certainly He did not exclude this primary truth as to the foundations of revelation and the very source of the message they were to bear. The authority of the Spirit is His own authority; the teaching of the Spirit He identifies with His own teaching (John xvi. 12-18).

Some seek relief here by drawing a distinction

between the views of the apostles and their dogmatic teaching. They admit that the apostles, notably St. Paul, did hold this plenary view of inspiration, but they assert that they did not dogmatically affirm it. Now, no doubt such a distinction might be made between the moral and spiritual truth taught by an apostle, and views he might hold as to questions relating to the science of his day—the extent and form of the world, and such like. But no such distinction can be drawn here, for the matter in question is a fundamental one, which underlies the whole of St. Paul's teaching. It is not merely expressed in isolated utterances, but it gives form and colour to all his teaching as to the Old Testament, the origin and mission of Christ, and the work of redemption. If St. Paul be discredited in regard to these fundamental conceptions, what becomes of his trustworthiness as an inspired teacher generally? If he is in error here, he may be in error anywhere and everywhere.

Such, then, is the divine origin of this wonderful book, or rather *Bibliotheca Sacra*. It is not a collection of miscellaneous literature, but a concrete organism, a living unity, in which each book and portion has its place; many members, but one body, pervaded by one spirit, having one object, setting forth one divine-human mediator, and

stamped with one authority; it is the Word of God.

2. On the other hand, we must with equal emphasis and distinctness affirm *the human character* of the sacred Scriptures. God in them speaks to men by the ministry of men. Sometimes the divine element has been insisted upon to the depreciation or even the virtual obliteration of the human element. A mechanical theory of inspiration has been held in which the writers are reduced to mere automata, amanuenses, writing at the dictation of the Spirit. Such a theory overlooks the most significant phenomena of the sacred volume. It is unable to account for the marked differences in style and method, and the distinctive characteristics of each writer impressed upon his own productions. It fails to appreciate or to utilize the designed diversity and manifoldness of teaching which is secured by a method which enshrines the divine revelation in a wonderful variety of human gifts and experiences, and which thus secures for the Word of God its affluent many-sidedness and its adaptation to the innumerable moods and wants of men with all their differences of circumstance and of character.

The divine influence does not obliterate the individuality of its instruments. It does not destroy personality, but strengthens, illumines, transforms

it. The supernatural enters into the revolving cycles of the natural, so to speak, tangentially, so as not to oppose or confuse their motions, but to accelerate them, and impart the new and stronger impulses of a fresh divine force, and reinvigorating energy.

Inspiration implies a co-operation of the divine with the human spirit. This co-operation is one of a series, and constitutes, I think we may say, the climax of that series. There is, first of all, that co-operation by which all life is sustained. God is neither to be confounded with the universe, after the fashion of the pantheist; nor, with the deist, is He to be relegated to some far off remoteness, whence He regards His creatures with distant unconcern. While He abides in the marvellous transcendence of His holiness and might, exalted far above the universe, yet is He at the same time immanent in it. For by Him it consists. No creature lives apart from Him. In Him we live, and move, and have our being. And still more vividly this immanence appears in the intellectual and moral life of man. Our reason is the reflection of the one supreme reason; and the gifts of genius the bestowal of His Spirit. His beneficent activities control and condition the workings of the human mind. Rising still higher to the spiritual life of the Christian, we know that

it is by His "holy inspiration we think those things that be good, and by his merciful guidance we perform the same." For, as St. Paul affirms, He effecteth in us both our willing and our working (Phil. ii. 13). Reaching beyond all these, and including them all, there is, for a special work and purpose, a very special divine co-operation with chosen and prepared human instruments, which we call "inspiration" in its highest and strictest sense. In general, the higher has, as I said, included the lower. It is true that God has occasionally dispensed with some of these. He could work altogether upon the basis of the lowest form of His divine immanence and make the dumb beast, as it were, phonographically, give utterance to His rebukes. He could upon the basis of a higher and intellectual immanence make ungodly men, like Balaam and Caiaphas, the proclaimers of His divine purpose. But ordinarily His spokesmen were prepared both intellectually and spiritually. The divine co-operation runs through and calls into action the whole scope of their personality, and utilizes all their gifts and experience, whether it be the eloquence and lofty statesmanship of an Isaiah, the sharp-sighted shrewdness and bold energy of a St. Peter, the contemplative wisdom and sacred simplicity of a St. John, or the profound intellect and wonderful spiritual ex-

periences of a St. Paul. In the case of the last-named apostle, who can doubt but that he was fitted for his great work not only by his intellectual gifts, but also by the extraordinary vicissitudes of experience and conflict by which he passed from the proud self-confidence of a Pharisee into the humble faith of a disciple of the Crucified? It is significant that this converted Pharisee should become the chosen champion of the truths and liberty of the Gospel, and the chief expounder of God's way of salvation by the righteousness of faith.

The divine operation would necessarily manifest itself in various forms, *e.g.*, in illumination and enlightenment, communicating truth not discernible by man; in gifts of wisdom, logically developing truth, imparting a right judgment in all things, restraining from error; in invigoration of memory, securing accuracy in testimony, but working in accordance with the laws of evidence, preserving the independence of the witnesses and affording that diversity of individual testimony which is a mark of truth and genuineness; in editorial co-operation, securing discrimination in the use of pre-existing material, and guiding the writer in such work as St. Luke describes, when he traced down accurately the course of the events he was about to narrate; and in the suggestion of apt and fit words wherever needful for the more complete and accurate setting

forth of revealed truth. For there is an inherent connection between word and thought, so that, as Beck observes, "this coalescence of the word with the thing, of the manifestation with the contents, in the one product of the revealing Spirit, lies in the nature of the case." In these and in other ways, which no analysis can completely distinguish, the inspiring Spirit wrought in and with the prophets and teachers who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. Such, then, so far as we can follow it, is the process by which this divine-human book has been produced. It is a truly human book, subject to all the laws which govern human language and literature—its words to be understood in their plain, grammatical sense, and its contents to be studied and interpreted in accordance with the laws of thought and language, and by the methods used in all such studies. Those who forget or ignore this side of the truth run into all the follies of fanaticism and the absurdities of arbitrary interpretation; their piety, however sincere, becomes dwarfed and distorted, and degenerates into a weak pietism, and they fail to find and appropriate the treasures of wisdom and knowledge which disclose themselves only to the wise and patient searcher. It is, at the same time, a truly divine book, the work of the Spirit, only to be rightly understood and truly appropriated by spiritual men



The guidance and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit is essential to the right understanding of revealed truth. Without it, the most learned scholar will understand far less of the real meaning and power of the truth than the humble Christian who sits daily at the feet of Christ and drinks in the lessons of heavenly wisdom.

#### THE PRODUCT—THE INSPIRED SCRIPTURES.

Secondly, let us, after this brief consideration of the *process* of inspiration, look more closely at the *product*—the one supreme and infallible rule of faith. Two questions here suggest themselves. If any errancy were established, would it discredit the rule of faith? and has any errancy actually been established?

##### I. WOULD ERRANCY INVALIDATE?

*Would any proved errancy discredit and invalidate the Scriptures as the rule of faith?* Some are ready at once to answer, yes. You may have met with those who have said that a single proven error or inaccuracy in the Scriptures would utterly destroy their faith in them and in Christianity. These persons entirely misunderstand the position, and give the sceptic an advantage to which he has no right.

If there were no such thing as inspiration,

and if, for example, the four gospels were written by four honest men, with no other qualifications or advantages than any sincere and capable men might have, who were giving a narration of what they had seen and heard, we would still possess well-established and irrefragable testimony to the great facts and truths which constitute the basis of our religion; we would still have in the testimony of such eye-witnesses the unimpeachable ground and foundation of historical Christianity.

1. But to return to my question: we must first determine the meaning of the word *errancy*, which is used in very different senses. Sometimes it seems to be so enlarged as to cover the gravest moral aberration. That critical school which at present makes the largest pretensions to scientific method asks us to accept a theory which assumes that the Pentateuch and Joshua are largely composed of myth, legend, and fiction; which asserts that the Book of Deuteronomy is a forgery of the time of Josiah brought into currency by means of a pious fraud; and that the greater portion of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers was invented and foisted upon the returned exiles as being the genuine original law of Moses. With what theory of inspiration can such wholesale fraud and deception be reconciled?

It is making too great demands upon our cre-

dulity for the supporters of such a theory to tell us, as Dr. Driver does (preface, p. xix.), that such criticism does not banish or destroy the inspiration of the Old Testament. It would be well for the church if those who hold such a view would, as Professor Robertson ("Early Religion of Israel," p. xi.) pertinently suggests, explain what they mean by inspiration in this connection. Such errancy as these theorists maintain is absolutely destructive of inspiration in any legitimate sense. The attempt to conceive of the revelation of divine righteousness as built upon any such immoral foundations is preposterous and self-contradictory.

It is not only the inspiration of the book which is imperilled, but its credibility is challenged. Robertson Smith has stated that "the proof that a book is credible must precede belief that it is inspired." How much credibility, we might ask him, remains to a literature largely composed, as these critics assert, of myth, legend, and forgery? And can the loosest and most elastic theory of inspiration admit such a volume within its compass? I cannot conceive how it is possible to reconcile the theories of Kuenen and Wellhausen with any Christian belief in a supernatural revelation. These men, the leaders and founders of the school, are avowedly antagonistic to such a revelation. I am

aware that some who have largely adopted these conclusions attempt to distinguish between the principles and the theories held by them, and think they can reconcile the theories with some vestiges of an Evangelical faith in the Scriptures. But I am persuaded that the fuller and legitimate developments of this school will demonstrate the position assumed by its adherents in Britain to be logically untenable. Such errancy as these theories imply completely invalidates the Scriptures as a supreme and infallible rule of faith.

But the term "errancy" may be applied in a sense which all admit. If it be limited to the superficial blemishes and literary imperfections which may occur in the most solid and faithful work, the question we are discussing assumes a very different character. As a matter of fact, we know that the Scriptures, as we possess them, transmitted through ages, often by means of imperfect manuscripts and defective translations, are unavoidably subject to the mistakes and blemishes of all such translation and transmission. But the existence of these defects does not detract one iota from the completeness of the revelation, or cast the slightest doubt upon a single great truth or fact recorded therein.

Such errata are wholly superficial and transient. Many of them have and all of them may yet re-

ceive explanation ; and even if they do not, they create no serious difficulty ; they do not touch upon any essential truth, or in the least impair the value and the credibility of the Scriptures.

2. Having thus, on the one hand, eliminated an errancy fundamentally immoral, which must prove fatal to any claims to inspiration ; and having, on the other hand, admitted a superficial errancy relating altogether to the form and not to the substance of the Scriptures, there still remains between the two a large field of possible errancy in matters relating to science and philosophy. Would such errancy invalidate the Scriptures as the infallible rule of faith ?

Some able and devout men have maintained that the divine inspiration extended only to the giving and recording of the moral and spiritual truths of revelation, and that in everything beyond these, everything within the domain of possible human knowledge, the writers of the Scriptures were left to the ordinary use of their faculties, controlled by their own moral faithfulness, and protected by the ordinary providential guidance which directs all things. Upon such a theory of inspiration, it is not only possible, but highly probable, that many mistakes and inaccuracies as to historical, chronological, geographical, or similar details and allusions, would be found in the

Scriptures ; and that absolute inerrancy and infallibility are to be found only in the domain of ethical and spiritual truth. There are, as I said, not a few able men who think that this was the method which God followed in giving us a revelation. I do not agree with them. I am persuaded that such a theory creates far more difficulties than it removes ; and that the distinction drawn in it is one that cannot be maintained. Nevertheless, supposing it to be correct, the revelation would not thereby be invalidated. The Scriptures would still abide supreme and infallible in their disclosures of moral and spiritual truth. Such defects in the realm of physical or philosophical truth, if they did exist, would no more affect the potency and sufficiency of the Scriptures, or detract from the splendour and authority of the presentation of revealed truth, than the spots on the sun mar the brilliancy of that great luminary, or interfere with his appointed functions as the great fountain of light and force for the earth.

Let us clearly understand the issue here. On the one hand, we have those who maintain that only in the reception and recording of the moral and spiritual truths which form the actual substance and contents of the revelation were the sacred penmen controlled and guided by the inspiring Spirit, who led them and protected them from

error and mistake therein ; while in the rest of the record they were left to the ordinary resources and guarantees of honest and capable witnesses, and were consequently liable to the inaccuracies and errors inseparable from human infirmity and ignorance.

On the other hand, there are those who maintain that inspiration extends to the whole compass and contents of the Scriptures ; and that not only were the truths of revelation thus imparted and recorded, but that the whole environment in which those truths are placed was constituted and composed under the influence and direction of the Spirit of God so as to preserve the record from error and inaccuracy throughout.

3. The ultimate settlement of the question in dispute can only be secured by the patient and thorough study of the Scriptures themselves, to which we can safely leave the issue. Truth has a self-attesting power which must result in the elimination of all error, and the ultimate separation of God-given revelation from all that may be inconsistent with it.

A remarkable process of elimination and discrimination has taken place in the formation of the canon by which the writings which constitute it have been separated from all other literature, and from the various apocryphal writings with which they were at times in danger of being confused.

These writings did not attain to their unique position and authority by means of any external authority and authorization. The authority of the Bible does not depend upon the authority of the church, as is sometimes erroneously affirmed. No council or church authority ever attempted to define what was Scripture, or to constitute a canon of Scripture. As a matter of fact, in the whole range of antiquity, only two councils ever dealt with the subject. One was the Arian Council of Laodiceæ, in 364, and the other the Council of Carthage, in 397, which owes all its prestige to the presence there of the great Augustine. They were both merely local synods; one was heretical. Neither of them claimed to constitute the canon, or to determine what was and what was not Scripture. They merely forbade the reading in the church of any other books than the canonical Scriptures; or, if any others were read, they were not to be read as the divine Scriptures. Neither attempted to make or define Scripture; but they simply affirmed that nothing but Scripture was to be read, as of divine authority, in the churches. No church, no council, ever attempted to determine the canon, or to give authority to it, until the Council of Trent, in 1546, promulgated its decree—a decree which bore the marks of its fallibility and of the incapacity of those who



affirmed it, in its canonization of the Apocrypha in opposition to the judgment and testimony of all Christian antiquity. No external church authority was concerned in the settlement of the canon.

We have, on the one hand, the external historical testimony of all ages and of all kinds of witnesses, Christian fathers, heretics, and heathen, that the books we now possess were received in their times as the inspired Scriptures. This is purely a matter of historical research and evidence.

We have, on the other hand, the internal evidence of the books themselves; their testimony to the conscience, the reason, and the heart. Their purity, holiness, and exalted moral character appeal to the conscience; their exhibition of God's work and wisdom, their setting forth of the plan and goal of history, their grasp upon the profound questions of man's origin and destiny, appeal to the intellect; their disclosures of divine grace and love, of the forgiveness of sins, of the richness and fullness of redemption, appeal to and satisfy the heart. Above all, there is that in them which makes itself felt as the living presence of the Holy Spirit, who in and by them bears witness to Christ, assuring the Christian of his possession of the truth, imparting the certitude of faith, and so quickening the letter that the living Lord is manifested to the believer.

Finally, this self-attesting witness of the Scriptures combines itself with the witness of history which it corroborates. For the chief factor in the historical testimony is the testimony of the Catholic church—not of the ecclesiastical organization, but of the body of believers in all ages who freely and spontaneously, without any external compulsion or authority, bear substantially the same testimony to the Scriptures as the one complete canon. The faith of each Christian, verified by his own experience and attested in his own consciousness, is thus supported, confirmed, and corroborated by the united voice of Christians in all ages. We have thus, by means of historical testimony, not merely external evidence to the fact that such and such books were received as inspired Scripture ; but we have in that external testimony the experience of the Spirit-taught men, through century after century, bearing the same witness and making the same affirmation. We know that the testimony of our own consciousness and experience is no illusion when we find it thus confirmed and corroborated by the Christian consciousness of all ages, and of all forms and conditions of Christian thought and experience. Such is the relation of the faith of the individual to the consensus of the church. Thus, as Dorner observes, “the canon explains and judges itself.”

Just as the canon of Scripture has been decided, so upon the same principles the inerrancy of the contents of Scripture must be ultimately decided. Critical study is invaluable towards this settlement, when it is honestly applied to the elucidation of the Scriptures. Let us welcome its most searching processes. The perplexities and conflicts which arise are just what we ought to expect. The processes of Christian knowledge are not exempt from the laws which govern and the difficulties which accompany all the processes of human acquisition. On the contrary, these difficulties constitute an essential factor in the discipline and methods by which Christian men are moulded and Christian truth is assimilated.

But critical study must learn to accept its subordinate and ancillary position to the truth of God's self-revelation. All its processes and achievements must ultimately minister to the vindication of the reality and completeness of that revelation, whether the inerrancy of the whole record be necessary, as we believe it to be, or not necessary, to that completeness and sufficiency which constitute the Scriptures the one supreme rule of faith.

I enlarge upon this point, because there are many who needlessly distress themselves with the fear of possible errors in the Scriptures and dread

of the consequences which they think would ensue from such errancy. But the foundation of God cannot thus be overthrown. What is needed is more faith in the love and wisdom of Him who gave us the revelation of Himself, and who can and will secure its sufficiency and stability.

## II. HAS ERRANCY BEEN ESTABLISHED?

But let us now pass on to our second question. While such errancy as I have described could not invalidate the Scriptures, *has the fact of such errancy been established?*

A Bible without difficulties would be itself the greatest difficulty of all. A Bible so inspired as to present no problems and create no perplexities, would impose the greatest strain upon our faith and furnish the most available weapon to the sceptic. The difficulties of the Bible are the difficulties of life. They are those which inhere in the very nature of things as they now exist. Their presence in the Bible is the best demonstration that it is a living book, and proceeds from the God of all life and wisdom.

Difficulties may prove the very best aids to faith, by the humility they teach us, and by the discipline to mind and heart which they afford. We must meet them fearlessly and courageously, as we ought to meet the difficulties of life. We do not refuse

to eat fish because of the bones, which we carefully lay aside, while we feed upon the nutriment presented to us. We want more of what Paley calls moral fortitude in the ability to keep a difficulty in its proper place, refusing to allow it to disturb our confidence in ascertained principles, and reserving it until more thought or more information is able to remove it.

Moreover, there is an important distinction, often overlooked, between difficulties and proved errors. The failure to distinguish between these seems to constitute what Dr. Warfield (*Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, iv., 220) pertinently describes as "the ineradicable inability of the whole negative school." We admit the existence of difficulties. Many such have been solved in the progress of research and investigation. Others still remain to be solved. But a proved error no one has and no can establish. The sceptical critics have been repeatedly challenged to produce such, but they have failed to do so. While, then, I do not consider absolute inerrancy essential to the credibility and sufficiency of revelation, yet I believe that, as a matter of fact, the Scriptures are inerrant, as the Spirit gave them to us.

The difficulties of the Bible may be divided into three classes. These are alleged discrepancies with science, with history, and with ethics. A brief glance at each must suffice.

1. As to the scientific difficulties, there are certain general principles which must be borne in mind. The Scriptures were not given to teach science, or history, or any other subject of knowledge attainable in ordinary ways. Their object is distinctly spiritual and religious, and all other subjects are subordinate to the main topic and purpose. Moreover, natural forces and objects are described phenomenally and in popular language. Scientific language would have been sadly out of place, and unintelligible; and that which suited one period would be an anachronism or an impossible anticipation at another. It is absurd pedantry even for scientific men to use such language in ordinary intercourse.

When men speak of a contradiction between the Bible and nature, a little enquiry will show us that the discrepancy generally, if not always, lies between some received interpretation of the Scriptures and some theory of science, either or both of which may be wrong. When such difficulties arise, we must patiently wait for the solution. Such difficulties are continually arising in science itself, in apparently contradictory phenomena, or when speculative hypotheses are confronted by new facts of which account had not been taken. The general harmony between the Bible and science is remarkable in two ways. There is, on the one

hand, the absolute freedom of the Biblical cosmogony from the errors and puerilities which mark every other cosmogony. The same holds good of the various allusions to nature and illustrations drawn from natural phenomena throughout the Scriptures. Compare, *e.g.*, St. Paul's illustration of the resurrection, I. Cor. xv., with the use made by Clement of Rome, but a few years later, of the story of the phoenix. Clement has been on this account accused of weak superstition, but he was not more credulous than the most learned and intelligent heathen writers of his day who accepted it. Before the Christian era it was adopted by Jewish writers, and, later, Christian fathers also accepted and repeated it without misgiving. But, although so marvellous and apparently suitable a symbol, it never appears in the New Testament. This is one illustration of that restraining influence of the divine inspiration which preserved the sacred writers from the absurdities into which their contemporaries fell. The Bible contradicts no known fact of science. Attempts to fix such a contradiction have ever signally failed. Take one instance. In that once notorious but now almost forgotten volume, "Essays and Reviews," it was stated that the Hebrew records taught the immobility of the earth. The proofs of this assertion were found in such passages as Ps. xciii. 1; civ. 5: "The

world also is established that it cannot be moved." "Who laid the foundations of the earth that it should not be moved forever." The same Hebrew word is used to describe the stability of piety. "The righteous shall never be moved," Prov. x. 30. Is he, therefore, an immovable fixture? But the word signifies, as Gesenius points out, to waver, shake, totter. The word implies motion, but steadfast motion in an appointed path, as in Ps. xvii. 5, where David prays, "Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not"; in the margin, "be not moved." Who is now troubled by the six days of creation, those *dies ineffabiles*, as the great Augustine called them—ineffable periods of divine working, symbolically expressed in the measures of man's daily toil? Or who finds any difficulty in the account of the deluge, manifestly by the narration of an eye-witness, who describes things phenomenally, as he witnessed the complete disappearance of the land, blotted out by the rising flood?

But there is much more than even the negative freedom from error of the Biblical allusions to nature; there is a remarkable correspondence between the order of the physical universe as related in the Scriptures and as unfolded by science, a correspondence which has been expounded by a Guyot, a Dana, and others who



were at once eminent students of nature and humble disciples of Christ. The actual scientific value of the Scriptures will become more and more manifest as science endeavours to set forth the ideas expressed in the phenomena with which it deals, and to ascertain the causes which underlie its laws. The Bible does not, indeed, teach empirical science ; but it does unfold the fundamental principles upon which the universe is constructed, which give unity and coherence to nature, and which lie at the roots of every scientific problem and investigation.

2. The question of historical difficulties opens up a wide and deeply interesting field, upon which amazing light has been thrown in recent years by the researches prosecuted in Palestine and Asia Minor, and in the seats of the great world-empires along the Euphrates and the Nile. By these explorations many obscurities and perplexities have been removed, and their whole tendency has been to confirm and illumine the Biblical narratives. How often it has happened, as in the case of the well-known difficulty of the tetrarch Lysanias being made by St. Luke a contemporary of the Herodian rulers, or Sergius Paulus being entitled a proconsul of Cyprus, that all attempts to suggest a possible solution of the difficulty elicited only scorn and ridicule from the rationalistic critics ;

and then afterwards some new discovery, some widening of the bounds of our knowledge, has justified the position of the apologists, and vindicated the accuracy of the sacred writer. All the more confidently may we expect that remaining difficulties only await increased knowledge to bring their own solution. No existing difficulty is absolute. Every one is capable of being explained upon some reasonable hypothesis which may be provisionally accepted until fuller information is acquired. Surely it is a saner and more reasonable course to accept such an hypothesis when it is available than to hasten to suspect and discredit prophet or evangelist? Can we withhold from the sacred writers this scanty measure of justice, which the classical scholar would at once grant to an Herodotus or a Tacitus? But the cases are rapidly diminishing in number in which any such hypothesis is needful. So vast and weighty is the body of confirmatory evidence which has been of late so rapidly acquired that it may be justly held to accredit the whole volume, and to entitle the small remainder of unsolved problems at least to the justice of a suspended judgment.

Let us take, for example, one book whose genuineness and credibility have been frequently and severely challenged. As Bishop Lightfoot has justly observed, no ancient book affords so many

tests of veracity as the Book of Acts ; for no other has such numerous points of contact with contemporary history, politics, and topography, whether Jewish, or Greek, or Roman. Large masses of evidence were accumulated by researches in Cyprus and Ephesus some fifteen years ago. Very much has since been added, especially by the indefatigable labours of Professor Ramsay in Asia Minor. Most significant is the judgment these researches have led him to form. For years, he tells us, he had, with much interest and zeal, but with little knowledge, followed the sceptical critics ; but he adds that in recent years, as he has come to understand Roman history better, he has realized that in the case of all the books of the New Testament it is as gross an outrage on criticism to hold them for second-century forgeries as it would be to class the works of Horace and Virgil as forgeries of the time of Nero. Again, he confesses the suspicion with which he had regarded a portion of the narratives. Now, he says, "I have learned that those points which roused suspicion were perfectly true to the first century, but were misjudged by me, because I contemplated them under the influence of prepossessions derived from the facts of the second century." We see how a candid and learned man may be led astray by prepossessions, and to what a large ex-

tent the apparent perplexities of Scripture require only the solvent of clearer and fuller knowledge of contemporary life and history. The Book of Acts has stood the onset of the fiercest criticism, and its accuracy, down to the minutest details, has been established beyond question.

3. The ethical difficulties are chiefly connected with the Old Testament, and are largely due to the failure to recognize the method and character of the revelation. It is an historical revelation, given *polumeros kai polutropos*, in many parts and in diverse ways. This implies growth, progress, development, an advance from the elementary to the more highly developed, from the imperfect to the more perfect. The slowness of its unfolding, to which exception has been frequently taken, is due to the very fact that it was made subject to the ordinary laws of historic development, and its outworking entrusted to human instrumentality. Too great haste would have retarded its progress or defeated its purpose; just as a father who prematurely entrusts his child with gifts which he has not yet power to use, retards, instead of advancing, his development.

In the same way, we find an explanation of the apparently worldly and external theory of life which parts of the Old Testament present. In the law the sanctions and rewards of good and

evil were largely drawn from temporal things. But in a preparatory economy the belief in a present retribution was necessary to form the basis of the belief in future retribution. The reality of the future retribution is assumed in the earlier just as in the later dispensation ; but the Mosaic economy had a special service to render in furnishing palpable reminders and evidences of God's present moral government of the world, and His constant interest and interference in the affairs of men.

The Mosaic legislation was confessedly imperfect. Take the case of the law of divorce, and our Lord's comment upon it. In drawing near to men to educate and uplift them, God condescended not only to their ignorance and weakness, but even to their moral perversity and hardness of heart.

Certain transactions of the old dispensation which had divine sanction have been spoken of as morally questionable, especially the destruction of the Canaanites. There are only two grounds upon which it could be challenged. Was it not just to those who suffered ? Who can question this, who knows anything of the foul degradation of the Canaanites ? "It is better," said Arnold, of Rugby, "that the wicked should be destroyed a hundred times over than that they should tempt those who are, as yet,

innocent to join their company. Let us but think what might have been our fate, and the fate of every other nation under heaven at this hour, had the sword of the Israelites done its work more sparingly. . . . The Israelites' sword, in its bloodiest executions, wrought a work of mercy for all countries of the earth to the very end of the world." In all, God acted justly; and yet with great patience and long-suffering.

But, it has been said, however just the judgment, was it not hurtful to the Israelites to make them its executioners? No; because it would not do violence to their moral conceptions. It was in harmony with their ideas of justice; and there was no conflict between the divine commands and their standards of equity. This, with other moral difficulties of the Old Testament, is admirably treated by Canon Mozley in his book on "The Ruling Ideas of the Ages," which I would recommend to your careful study.

Another great difficulty in regard to the inspiration of the Old Testament is found by earnest Christian men in the apparently vindictive spirit which breathes through certain portions, especially in some of the psalms. Certainly, there is a great contrast between their stern severity and the gracious teachings of forgiveness and grace which characterize the New Testament. Yet we will

find that these stern utterances always accord with justice ; and that the indignation which burns in them is a righteous one. Its object is always God's enemies and the violation of His law. Nowhere is there personal animosity. It is true that it is the spirit of Elijah, the stern legal spirit, which the Lord Himself contrasts with the spirit which should animate His followers. But it was in keeping with the temporary legal dispensation which was a necessary discipline, preparatory to the revelation of grace. Before the marvels of grace could be proclaimed or appreciated, it was needful to vindicate God's holiness, and to emphasize the evil of sin and its awful deserts.

These few meagre and inadequate hints may serve at least to indicate the direction in which we must look for the solution of these difficulties. Yet, after all, they are not the difficulties of the book merely ; they are the difficulties of life ; and in regard to very many of them we must be content to walk by faith, not by sight. Much depends upon our own attitude. We may so concentrate our thoughts in unbelief upon what is dark and difficult that we become blinded to the wisdom and the love which, after all, reign supreme. We may deal with the Scriptures as many deal with Providence, and involve ourselves in the gloom and suspiciousness of distrust. Or



we may follow on in simple, childlike faith, bearing humbly and patiently the divine discipline which makes the storm and the darkness the habitation of love, and which assures us of a time of fruition, when we shall know even as we are known.

The position of the written revelation is closely analogous to that of the general revelation of God in nature. The universe presents to us a correlated system, harmoniously adjusted and self-consistent. The highest aim of the scientific thinker is to formulate a complete view of the universe in its unity, and to justify it to the reason ; and this he sets before him in spite of many perplexing problems, unsolved difficulties, and even apparently conflicting phenomena. The existence of these he attributes to his own incomplete knowledge. He does not regard them as inherent in the system of things. He pursues his studies with absolute confidence in the permanence and harmony of the laws of the universe, and he does not doubt but that he will be able ultimately to demonstrate its solidarity and self-consistency.

Now, we make precisely the same claims and entertain the same confidence in regard to the revelation of grace and truth recorded in the Scriptures. We believe it to be logically self-consistent and organically complete, and we are con-



fidant that, whatever perplexities and difficulties are met with, they are capable of ultimate solution. Our Lord declared, "The scripture cannot be broken." Our faith in its stability and permanency is built upon the word of Him who said of the Old Testament: "One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law until all be fulfilled," and who placed the same seal of authority and permanence upon the New Testament when He declared: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

The great question for us all is a very practical one. Are we doing justice to this divine book in our study of it and in our loyal obedience to its revelations? The more we know of the Scriptures, the more deeply we dig into them, the more thoroughly and exhaustively we search them, the more will they grow upon us. We shall possess such views of their majesty; such realization of their power; such experience of their living efficacy as counsellor and comforter, that the difficulties and blemishes which once loomed up so largely will seem but as the motes in the sunbeam, or some minute flaw in a magnificent statue. A mere literary study, however painstaking, will not suffice. We must read as searchers after truth; and what we learn, we must obey and assimilate, if we would advance in knowledge. There must be a

sympathetic spirit. Herein is where so many fail, be they ever so wise.

Says Professor Ramsay, to whom I have already referred: "If I reach conclusions very different from those of the school of criticism whose originators and chief exponents are German, it is not that I differ from their method. I fully accept their principle, that the sense of these documents can be ascertained only by resolute criticism; but I think that they have often carried out their principle badly, and that their criticism often offends against critical method. True criticism must be sympathetic." And he attributes their mistakes to a lack of true sympathy. It is a law of the kingdom which prevails in lower as well as in higher cycles. There can be no appreciation of art without an artistic spirit; nor of science, without a scientific spirit; nor of religion, without a religious spirit. The Jews of our Lord's day were, in a sense, diligent students of their sacred writings; and yet they knew not Him of whom those Scriptures testified.









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HOLY SCRIPTURES



AN ADDRESS TO THE ALUMNI

BY THE

REV. PRINCIPAL SHERATON, D.D.

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